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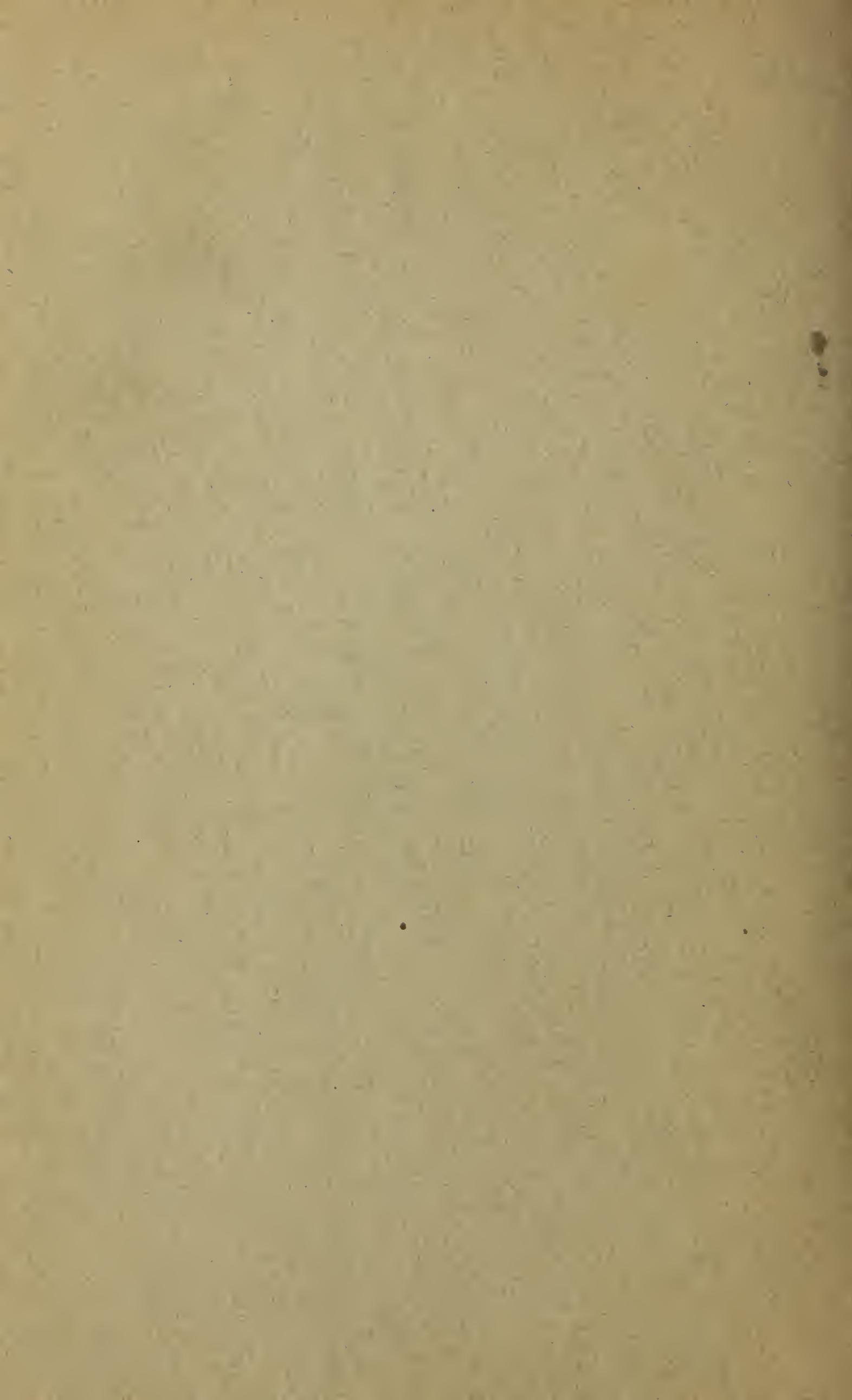
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CATHEDRAL CHURCH

OF

ST. PATRICK, DUBLIN.

1900.



THE NATIONAL
CATHEDRAL OF ST. PATRICK,
DUBLIN.

DISCRIMINATION OF ITS ANCIENT ARCHITECTURE

AND

VARIOUS REPARATIONS AND DISCOVERIES, 1900.

THE NEW ORGAN AND ITS PLACE

A REPORT TO THE DEAN AND CATHEDRAL BOARD.

BY

SIR THOMAS DREW,

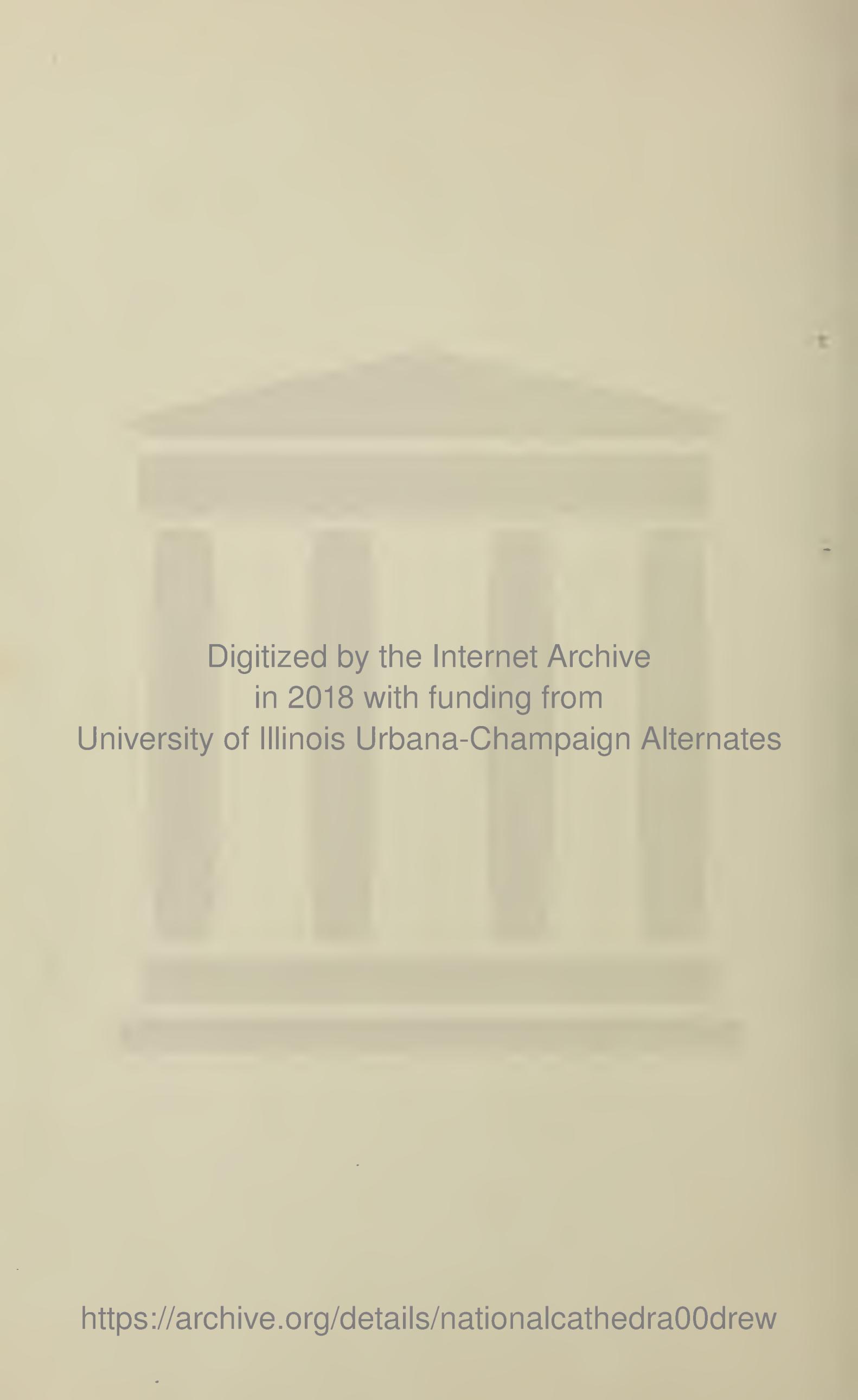
Cathedral Architect

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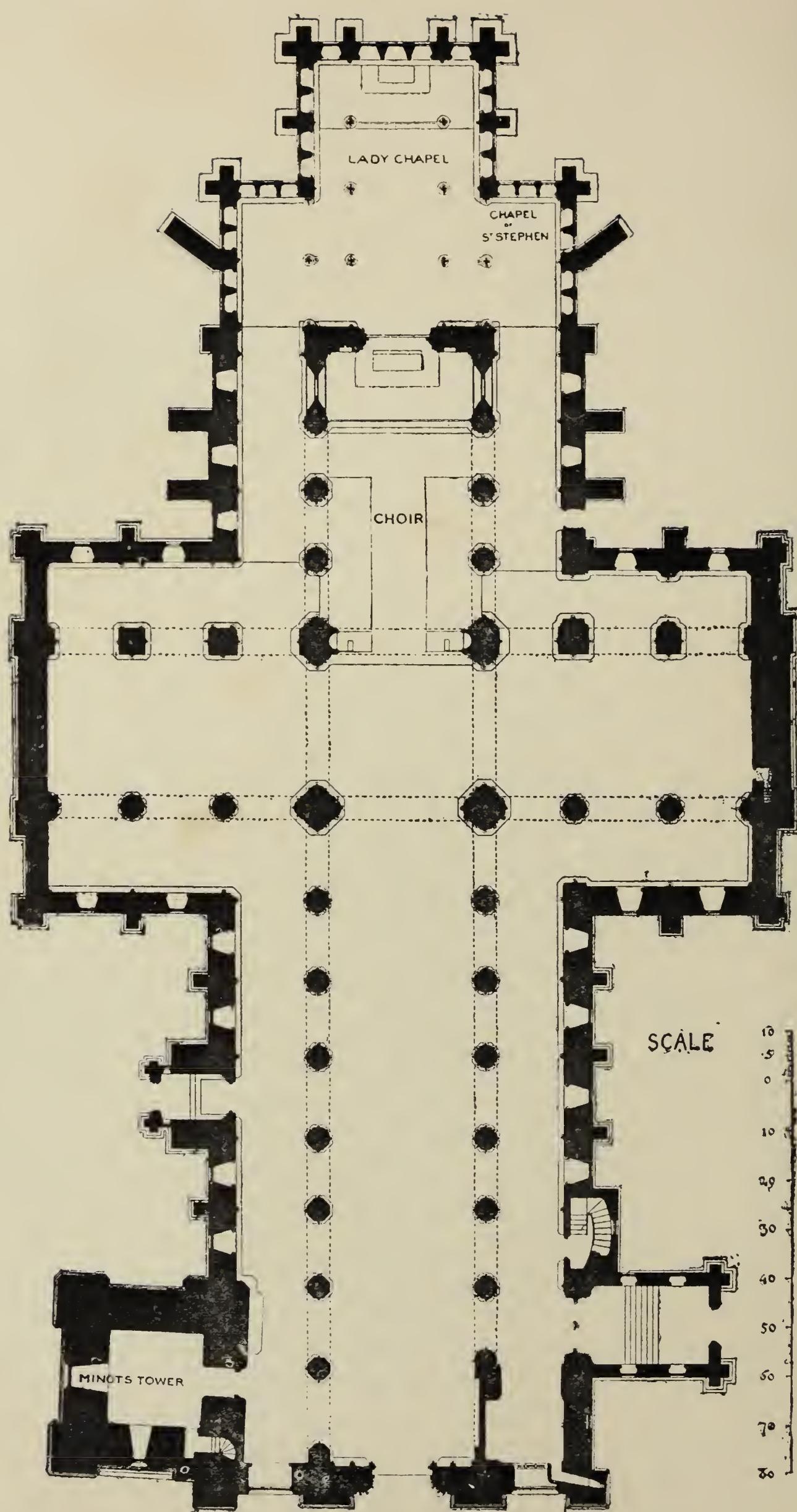
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ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL.—RESTORATIONS AND DISCOVERIES OF 1900.

It will come as a surprise and gratification to many to learn that in the progress of recent restorations and improvements which the Dean and Chapter have been obliged to enter on at St. Patrick's Cathedral, much of new interest in the history of a noble building has been evolved. Interesting it has always historically been; and noble and impressive as a Church since its interior was first opened up as of one Church in 1865. Its architectural and archæological merits, and the extent and value of the work surviving from the 13th Century have been never quite appreciated popularly. In the process of conservative restoration that has been proceeding, much has come to light of the history of the Cathedral building, and especially that of the Choir and Eastern Chapels, which cannot fail to be new to the ecclesiologist and antiquarian, and is now given to the public for the first time.

Those who have approached St. Patrick's from the East, passing by the North Close, for some years past have noted with regret into what ruinous condition the stonework of the Eastern Chapels was falling. Many survive who remember that it was little more than 50 years since a thorough restoration, for the time, was made of the beautiful Early English Eastern Chapels, by an effort of Dean Pakenham. It was carried out under one of the most distinguished Church architects of that day, Mr. R. Carpenter, the builder being a Mr. Thomas Kingsmill, of Dublin. The famine of 1847, and distressed times following, stayed the scheme of entire restoration. When it was resumed, and the main part of the building saved from dissolution and extinction by the great work munificently undertaken by Sir Benjamin Lee Guinness in 1864, the eastern end, not 20 years restored, appeared perfect and with renewed lease of life. Unfortunately, however, a mistake had been made as to the stone used, which is not without parallel elsewhere. The ancient wrought stone of mediæval building, which shewed remarkable endurance for 600 years at St. Patrick's, was some-

what ignorantly pronounced by modern masons to be French stone from Normandy. Those who are geologically wiser now, wonder how such a theory could have been confidently laid down and accepted. A comparison of the ancient stone with the modern imported stone from Caen, in Normandy, shews a wide difference in character and quality. If even antiquarian record had been looked up, evidence was forthcoming that the source of the fine and durable stone which the mediæval English builders used was that country which supplied the stone of Glastonbury Abbey, and Salisbury and Wells Cathedrals—the great Oolite quarries of Somerset—which also supplied all the country of Wales between them and the sea, and the eastern seaboard of Ireland beyond. However (as in the neighbouring Christchurch restoration in 1872), soft Caen stone was ignorantly employed in 1845, and has proved a disastrous failure

When Dr. Jellett came into his Deanery in 1892, the spectacle which confronted him was the exterior of the east end of his Cathedral in deplorable dilapidation, distressing in the impoverished state of the Cathedral funds. It was not even then absolutely dangerous, but by 1898 it had become so, as large pieces of rotten stone, detached by rain and frost, frequently fell around the eastern group of buildings. A worse anxiety was to follow, when about Christmastime of 1898 alarming fissures began to develop in the east end of the Choir, and the Cathedral architect had to report to the Dean and Cathedral Board that the extreme limit had been reached when the warnings of serious catastrophe could be longer disregarded. The emergency was of such a nature, involving as it did the stability of vast masses of moving and threatening masonry, and complex pressures, and old and decrepit building, as does not fall to the experience of the ordinary builder. The architect, looking for timely assistance to avert catastrophe, was permitted to apply to Messrs. Thompson and Sons, of Peterborough, for the aid of some of their skilful staff of men who had been lately engaged in the notable feat of saving the great west front of Peterborough from predicted ruin, the great tower and spire of Salisbury, and whose expert operations at Winchester had excited the attention of all scientific architects in the Kingdom. The response of the English builders was prompt. Some of their most skilful foremen and resourceful workmen were at once detached

from other works, and within a week from the application to Messrs. Thompson and Co., they were passed over to Dublin, and the special plant and material and appliances required in salvage of such dangerous structures were being delivered at the Cathedral. The cost of the timely work of shoring up and staying the impending ruin, amounting to over £1,000, imposed on the Cathedral Board, was a serious call upon the funds at their disposal, and an anxiety of which it was relieved by the generosity of Lord Iveagh in a special contribution to the Cathedral fund. There operations would have been stayed, and there was for a time a prospect for the architect and Cathedral authorities of standing by a Cathedral stayed and propped on crutches with a forest of massive balks of timbers for years to come, until Lord Iveagh again intervened with offer of his kindly help in placing further subscriptions from time to time to the Cathedral account. In this way have the Dean and Chapter been enabled to proceed from step to step in restoration of the ruinous exterior.

Before entering on a description of still further reparations and improvements contemplated, it may be well to give a short and clear account of the original plan and design of St. Patrick's Cathedral, and of what has survived of it through the centuries from 1230 to 1900, a history which is somewhat generally misunderstood.

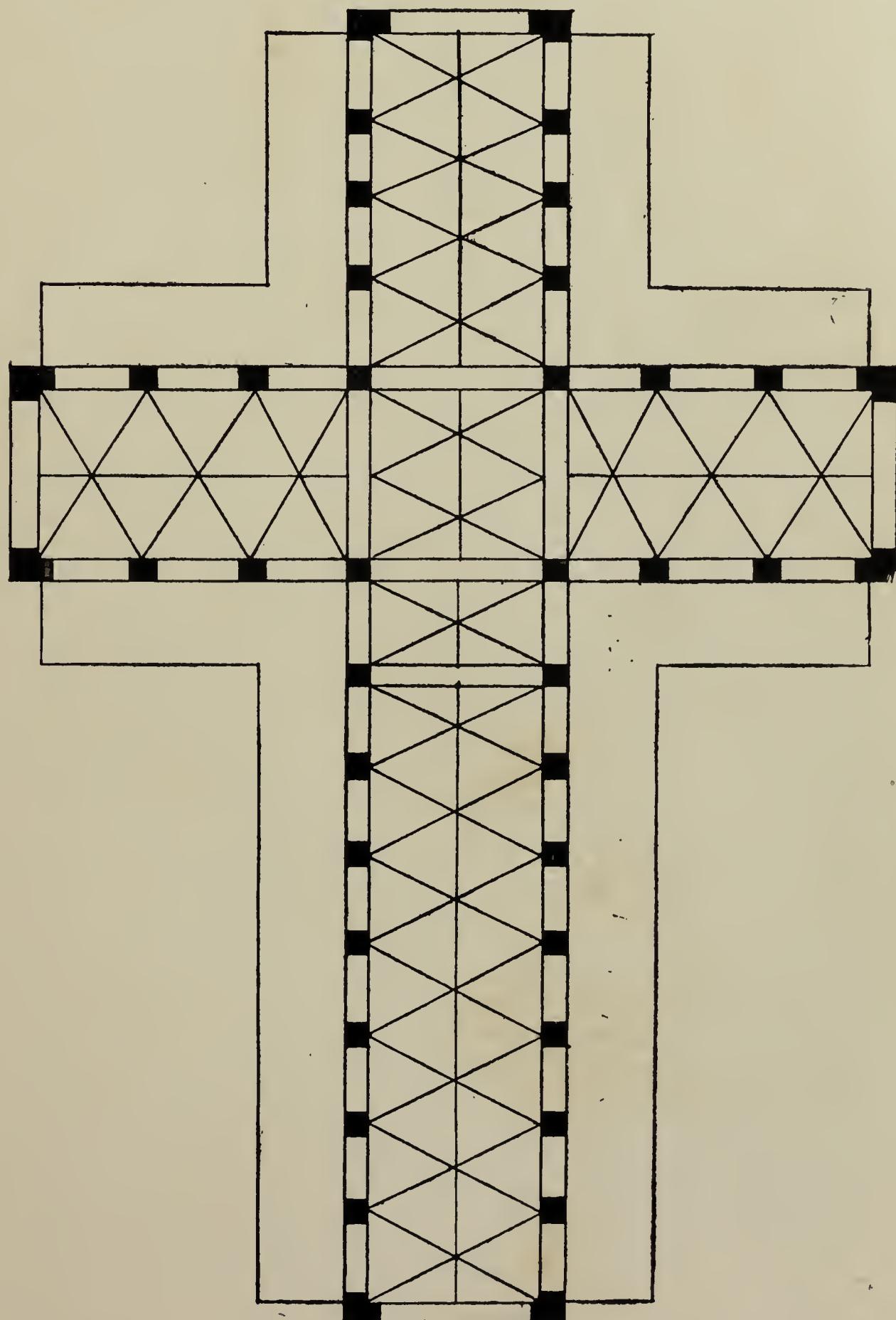
ST. PATRICK'S PLAN AND ITS SURVIVAL.

The ground plan of St. Patrick's Cathedral survives on its ancient lines in perfection of symmetry and proportions as it was originally cast by its designer about 1225. The style of architecture of the original building ascribes it to a period not earlier than that date, while the Chapels at the Eastern end are recorded as of the building of Bishop Fulk de Saundford, about 1260. The constitution and establishment of a Collegiate Church of St. Patrick is rightly ascribed to Archbishop Comyn, about 1190, but the statements of guide books, which attribute the *building* of the Church to that prelate, are manifestly mistaken, as it would have been an impossibility for him to have built a church in the Early English fashion of architecture which did not develop itself until after his death.

The ground plan as a study on paper is of singular beauty of proportion and perfect symmetry, of which there is no similar example in England. It reveals itself as the design of a mathematical mind which arrived at the proportions of a Latin cross by the placing together a number of absolutely uniform equilateral triangles, which are found to agree in indicating the widths and proportions of every main feature. The Choir, Nave, and Transepts in plan present a perfect cross. The aisles of the Nave and Transepts and Choir which surround this, extended on the same accurate system of triangulation, present another proportion of a Latin cross of no less beauty, the repeated dimension of 16 feet being evident as a factor in the proportion of every feature of its plan.

It seems to be not generally understood that the revelation of the incomparably perfect conception of a church plan as a whole, was reserved for this century. It was for the citizens of Dublin first to realize in 1867 what the Church of 1250 was intended to be. The fabric is its own record of neglect and indifference to architectural beauty and fitness on the part of the Anglo-Norman prelates (with, perhaps, one exception) who followed Fulk de Saundford in succession. It was not from poverty that the Church was permitted to stand deformed, but more probably from the diversion of its ample endowments, by

A DIAGRAM SHEWING THE CROSS OF ST PATRICK'S
DESIGNED ON EQUAL EQUILATERAL TRIANGLES



selfish and secular greed of ecclesiastics—both in pre-reformation and post-reformation times alike—to other purposes than the perfection of their Church. The southern arm of the cross might as well have been lopped off. The whole southern Transept, as we now see it, was built off to serve as a temporary Chapter-house, but which was permitted to be “temporary” for six centuries.

To avoid the expense of building an independent Church for the parishioners of St. Nicholas Without, at some later period the northern arm was cut off, and a solid walling separated the North Transept. A solid screen of masonry, once the Rood screen, stood across the western great arch of the Nave, subsequently still further blocked by the organ standing upon it, with a screen of wood and glass completely filling the arch. This effectually divided the main limb of the cross into two separate sections. At another time the Lady Chapel, now seen through the open eastern arch, was a built-off chamber for the services of the Huguenot congregation. As late as 1863 “St. Patrick’s” was for an attendant congregation, but an isolated section consisting of the Choir, or upper limb of the cross and the square at the intersection of the arms, known as the “Crossing.” This, encrusted with two tiers of wooden galleries, and boxed more after the fashion of the theatre than a church, was the place of service, which no exercise of imagination could have connected with the other branches of the cross and the surrounding aisles of which it was a part in plan. This was the condition of degradation and misappropriation of parts which it was the intelligent intention of the restoration of 1864 to rescue the Church from.

To the Dublin congregation who flocked on St. Matthias’ Day, 1865, to view a newly revealed Church of a plan of which they were unintelligent, a pleasing surprise was evident, but neither to it or successive visitors since does there seem to have been any clear comprehension of in what that restoration consisted, and what of ancient survival and interest is presented still. There seems occasion for an authoritative account of what is ancient genuinely and what restoration.

THE NAVE

is much restored, superficially at least, because this division of

the fabric has suffered much in centuries of vicissitude and dilapidation. Yet no pier or arch is new, no proportion changed, and no feature lost of the original mediæval plan.

It had through the centuries a chronic recurrence of inundations of the Poddle River. Until lately there existed in the Cathedral a wooden post, on which were marked the flood levels and dates recorded of such visitations, and the recurrent flooding in the low-lying valley sapped and rotted its foundations and piers. There may be passed by records of various misadventures which are possibly inaccurate, until 1362 when there is no question there was a serious mishap and destruction of part by a fire, which occurred "through the carelessness of John, the Sexton." The record of that is on evidence in the building itself. Facing the visitor entering by the South Porch there are on the north side of the Nave three arches out of correspondence with the rest of the arcade. The shallow moulding of these arches and of the door entering the Tower, and the fine flamboyant window (well restored) in the north aisle indicate the reparation by Archbishop Minot in 1370 after the fire, when he also built the great belfry.

In the latter part of the reign of Henry the VIII. the groined roof fell in, with the usual destructive accompaniment of thrust-out and shattered walls incident to such catastrophes. Then came suppression of the Cathedral in 1546, and more neglect and dilapidation, until Queen Mary's conscience minded her in 1554 to "*restore our Metropolitane and Prebendarie Churche and Chapitre of Saincte Patricque in Irelande unto her pristyne honorable state.*" Thereafter came its desecration and many injuries during the usurpation of the Commonwealth from 1641 to 1660, when some citizens returning to worship make record of "*the decayed and ruinous state of the ancient and once most famous and beautiful Cathedral Church of St. Patrick, occasioned by the sacrilege and neglectful impiety of these latter times.*"

In 1670, the wooden roof was gone, and was replaced by an oak one from the woods of Shillelagh. By 1790 this roof in turn succumbed, and the rude, unsightly, and cobwebbed covering, remembered in 1863, was devised.

At this time, 1790, Parke, the architect, and Cooley, another

eminent architect, describe the Nave as so dangerous, the walls hanging two feet from the perpendicular, that service was suspended. It seems to have been in the perfunctory reparation following this that plain and rude octagonal granite pillars were put in to carry the arches once borne on beautiful clustered Early English piers. These granite posts survive in the heart of the piers, having been cased with Caen stone in 1864. It is somewhat wonderful that so much of ancient interest should be found in the Nave. It is satisfactory to know, however, that its aisles are old work and bear their ancient stone-groined ceilings. In the Nave, the present ceiling is a restoration with good stone-groining ribs on sufficient evidence, the intermediate spandrel work being formed in timbering and lath and plaster, simply because the old walls were considered unequal to sustain a greater weight.

THE CROSSING

at the Transepts is altogether satisfying. The four beautiful arches and groined roof of stone are of ancient uninjured work—the crown of the Cathedral—lately repaired. With its good moulding of arches and piers cleansed of plaster and whitewash, and the original warm-coloured Somerset stone exposed, it presents now a composition and study of complete Early English architecture comparable with that of Salisbury or Beverley.

THE NORTH TRANSEPT

has a western aisle of ancient survival. All else is avowedly modern, for, separated as the parish Church of St. Nicholas, it had been wholly ruined, and was down to the ground at the end of the last century and the beginning of this. The rebuilding of 1864 is the third rebuilding of this part within a century. It had preserved no fragment of or likeness to its original architecture save some foundations of an ancient Chapel of St. Lawrence projecting eastward, seen in 1818 and again uncovered this year. In the absence of evidence it was rebuilt as a copy of the South Transept.

THE SOUTH TRANSEPT

presents much of genuine old and interesting architecture. It was shut off to serve as a Chapter-house and robing-room, as

before mentioned, from the first building of the Church. It is unrecorded whether it ever had its stone roof or lost it, but there was evidence enough from the springers to restore moulded groined ribs of stone on true lines in 1864. The ceiling filling is as in the Nave for like reasons. Above the groining survives an oak hammer-beamed roof of the 1680 restoration. The Transept has its ancient stone-roofed aisles.

THE CHOIR

is the coming revelation of architectural survival for the delight of those who prize genuine ancient architecture, and, in the course of the examination for its reparation, disclosing such hidden merits as to surprise those who knew the Cathedral best. It was untouched in previous restorations, save one, when, in 1787, the Chapter ordered the removal of the dangerous groined roof, and it may be assumed (as it cost but £330) substituted a very miserable and deformed ceiling of lath and plaster, having quasi-groin ribs made up of thin wooden round rods grouped and tacked up with small nails.* Fortunately the surviving wall-ribs give all evidence requisite for a true restoration of this feature. For the first time, with proper scaffolding erected, this portion of the Church has been under expert scrutiny, and a first feeling of consternation conveyed of how, unsuspectedly, so perilously near the last days of its existence it had run. Patching, plastering, and whitewash daubing of many indifferent generations had not only obscured the architectural beauty of old work, but also concealed from observation below, fissures and failures impending. Yet it is relief that in the very carelessness of maintenance its architectural details have been spared. There is none that is not capable of the most conservative repair and restoration. Within a few months, the Choir of St. Patrick's may be looked for as a surviving gem of 13th Century architecture with no feature or moulding varying from its original building; with carved capitals, out of sight now, reappearing, and the walls glowing with the warm cut stone ashlar, long concealed by the rudest plastering over it. The Crossing and Choir of St. Patrick's may be expected to present a complete survival of genuine and characteristic 13th Century architecture which will lend a

* This was within memory decorated with faded blue and powdered with gold stars, and seems to have been so glorified for the first installation of the Order of St Patrick.

new interest and charm for every appreciative visitor and student. The Choir aisles, ancient and stone-roofed still, will worthily flank the Choir. An opportunity long looked for by many has happily arisen for re-opening the north Choir aisle, in correspondence with its fellow on the south side. This has been up to the present, and unavoidably, blocked and obstructed, as a temporary measure it may be said, since the organ lost its place on the old screen in 1864, and a place had, for the time, to be found for it somewhere.

THE LADY CHAPEL.

with its lateral Chapels of St. Stephen on the south and of forgotten dedication on the north side, are a rebuilding from nearly floor level in 1846, a scholarly, true and careful reproduction from well-marked evidence of the Chapels of Fulk de Saundford of 1260. In 1846 the Lady Chapel, with some ancient windows only, survived the French congregation as one undivided room with a flat ceiling.

The discrimination of the ancient architecture of St. Patrick's must, of course, be taken as applicable only to its interior. On the exterior excessive ruin at many periods has left but survival of ancient form of the *corpus*, and left little of any old architectural details for the student. In the restored 14th Century flying buttresses the chapels of the eastern end, and in Minot's great belfry tower alone, will be found ancient form of details.

THE ORGAN.

There are many who have opinions, or are even authorities, as to Cathedral services and their musical perfection, who have not regard to the architectural aspect of the question. It is not before their minds that when our mediæval Cathedrals were designed, the modern institution of the Church Organ was as little dreamt of as the locomotive engine, or the steamship, or the bicycle of a future century. Our great instrument of modern development is an intrusion on the mediæval plan, and a serious difficulty to find a place for it. It is useless for the theorist on ideal acoustic effects and the relations of the ideal organ to an ideal choir, and with a fine disregard for space and dimensions and architectural proprieties, to demand impatiently

that the typical Cathedral, however spacious, must lend itself to accommodate the ideal organ. It is, however, matter of fact that no mediæval Cathedral in the kingdom has lent itself to housing the modern organ without some unsatisfactory conditions, and with more or less of obstruction or disfigurement of architectural beauty; such as, for instance, in such a Cathedral as Worcester is intolerable. It requires a new Cathedral plan, such as that of Truro, to be adapted to new conditions.

The extreme severity of plan and symmetry of St. Patrick's Cathedral of Dublin, of a simple cruciform every division of which is an integral part of a whole, and that can afford the blocking off of no part, makes the problem of organ placing in this Church a peculiar difficulty. When the organ grew in importance and dimensions so that it could no longer stand upon the crossing screen, and some place had to be assigned to it, it was manifest that none could be given that did not obstruct and disfigure architectural perfection, and none that could afford acoustic freedom or convenient relations of an organ to a choir. Necessity for the time demanded in 1864 that the beautiful north choir aisle should be occupied by the organ, but to the organ-builder, organist, and the musical corps of the Cathedral, and architects, it has been an aspiration for 30 years that a more tolerable disposition of the organ would be one day made.

It was an architect's suggestion that a chapel opening into the modern-built North Transept, occupying the foundation lines of a former Chapel of St. Laurence, might meet the case. However, from a superior and unquestionable authority, the skilled Cathedral organist, and from one so decided and definite and practical as Sir George Martin, of St. Paul's, came the following opinion in 1898:—

- “(1) The organ should be so placed that its tone shall pervade the building more or less equally, and especially it should be well heard by the choir.
- (2) The organ should as little as possible interfere with the architectural beauties of the building.

The *present* position of the organ violates both these conditions.

The scheme (of a chapel off the North Transept) is apparently based on the position of the organ in Lichfield Cathedral. As I have played the organ at the Lichfield Choral

Festivals for some years past, I know from experience that it is a precedent that ought *never* be followed. The tone of that instrument is deafening to the people in the North Transept, and is inaudible to the choir. It would be a serious matter to reproduce such a failure. I propose that a chamber should be made above the groined roof where the organ now stands. This chamber must be raised high enough to embrace the clerestory windows on the north side of the Chancel. The sound of the organ will come chiefly through these windows, and will be well heard in the Chancel and, coming from such altitude, will pervade the whole building. By this means the architectural part of the inside of the building will be much improved as the North Chancel aisle will be free like that on the south side; and not only will the choir hear the organ, but the organist, who will be placed in the triforium, can command a view of the whole length of the interior.

The present organ, as regards mechanism, is only historically interesting, but the pipes are good."

When Dean Jellett entered on his charge at St. Patrick's, the condition of the organ became an early subject of solicitude. He found, as was reported to him, the organ, as it had been set up well at the time in 1865, made up of parts, some by famous builders—Renatus Harris, Byfield, and Bevington—and that it had seen 27 years of hard work with incessant daily use in services or in pupils practising. The water pressure on the blowing-engines was insufficient.

The hydraulic engines of an early type, superseded generally elsewhere by engines of much improved efficiency, were unequal to their work and overtaxed in supplying the feeders, besides being utterly worn out and not worth repair. Much injury had been done to the organ and mechanism by the 'tinkering' and destructive carelessness of various mechanics and others, and the locked case guarding the mechanism from intruders torn away in impatience to get access for repairs and oiling. The Melvin starting valve was gone. Water had escaped into the trackers and bellows.

The trackers were walked on and some broken. The instrument was injured by excessive and unintermitting daily use for practise by many, and some inexperienced players. The

keys were worn down to the wood, due in great measure to much playing with unclean fingers.

The Dean took steps to make such repairs and provisions as the limited fund he could raise by subscriptions would effect. Better water pressure was granted by the Corporation, and Melvin engines of modern type supplied. A small organ for teaching was purchased, and the greater organ has been since reserved to use for services only.* General repairs were effected ; but after eight years more the organist had to report that the instrument would ere long be inefficient, and a fund was started for thorough renovation, and supply of less obsolete mechanism and modern pneumatic action. It was felt at the same time that although the organ contained some beautiful stops of Harris' organ of 1689, which the Cathedral would never part with under any circumstances, and some excellent pipes by the later builders worth preservation, it was unsatisfactory that a large sum of money should be spent on an organ made up by different hands without systematic or sympathetic regard for general plan. Of course, a new organ of first-class and coherent plan with latest improvements of mechanism, and embodying the best parts of the older organs, was the thing to be desired, but out of sight or expectation.

Since then such an organ has come in view by the generous offer of Lord Iveagh to the Dean and Chapter, and it can be announced is already in process of building.

Mr. Henry Willis, oldest and most experienced of organ builders, and himself an admirable organist, was appealed to for an opinion, without any knowledge of the previous one by Sir George Martin, or the architect's proposal as to carrying it out. He propounded one independently as to the placing the organ practically identical with Sir George Martin's. When Mr. Willis learnt that such a scheme had been under consideration in other minds for two years, and had been considered in all details and was feasible, his enthusiastic opinion was that he was granted "an ideal position for an organ," and that the best organ that could be built by him might now be placed in the best position he ever built an organ for, in any Cathedral, and

* Since the Report went to press the small organ has been added to and improved by Messrs. Telford & Sons, and now constitutes an effective instrument for accompaniment of Church Services as well as for teaching.

that argument appeared overwhelming to him for such an architectural addition to the Cathedral under consistent architectural care. Mr. Carpenter, the eminent architect, had in 1846 proposed to place the organ in a somewhat similar position in the triforium as the only solution of a problem of organ placing from which there was no escape.

It is a happy circumstance that this work can be effected without the alteration of a single architectural effect of the Church as viewed from the interior, and that it combines the prospect of enhanced beauty in restoration and strengthening of ancient work, now almost tottering to a fall in the choir. The new Organ aisle, which measures 41 feet x 13 feet, stands over three bays of the North Chancel aisle and abuts upon the North Transept. It has already been stated that this portion of the Church is the one which is entirely modern, and its old design but conjectural, and dates from 1865. There is no architectural feature externally of ancient design affected by the consistent addition now being made except in the removal of the two flying arches now seen abutting on the Choir wall.

THOMAS DREW, F.R.I.B.A.,

Cathedral Architect.

December 24th, 1900.



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